



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913

PH (517) 373.1635 | FAX (517) 373.3300

www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/vanwoerkom/

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Contact: Kirk Hanna
(517) 373-1635

Legislation protecting vitality of Michigan forests signed into law

LANSING – A three-bill package aimed at protecting Michigan’s forests for families, tourists and small businesses was signed into law on Friday, said Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom, chair of the Senate Agriculture, Forestry and Tourism Committee.

“State forests play a critical role in providing jobs and economic opportunities to workers and small – business owners in our local communities,” said Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores. “These laws will promote the healthy growth of the forestry industry in the state and ensure the sustainability of Michigan forests for generations to come.”

The package is part of the Senate Republican’s JOBS Action Plan. The plan focuses on ways that Michigan can create new jobs, save existing jobs and promote a more competitive business climate.

Senate Bills 1023 and SB 1024, co-sponsored by Van Woerkom, and House Bill 5554, now Public Acts 123-125 respectively, were signed into law on May 26.

SB 1023 establishes four forest pilot areas to find the most efficient and effective methods of harvesting timber while protecting wildlife habitats.

SB 1024 revises the Forest Finance Advisory Authority to expand the authority from five to nine members, and names the state treasurer as chairman. SB 1024 also allows the Forest Development Fund to be used for the acquisition and maintenance of the forest certification.

HB 5554 establishes a third-party certification system to create important parameters guiding the future management of state forest lands. The certification should benefit the social, economic and environmental value and marketability of Michigan’s forest resources.

“I am glad the governor opted to protect the vitality of Michigan’s forests by signing this important legislation into law,” Van Woerkom said. “Our forests serve as essential resources for many families in this state, especially families living in communities located in Northern Michigan and in the Upper Peninsula.”

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